



Torrid times before the birth

In the last chapter we met Dorothy, a beautiful young woman, confined to the family doctor's home and surgery, unable to venture out until she gave birth to her first child, conceived out of wedlock. Six-months before there had been a torrid meeting between her family and the man who had captured her virginity: an air force pilot, home from war.

.....

Tracking back through those early days in Yorkshire, to a day six months before George was born, we come upon a tumultuous event taking place in the large, stone-built residence (bought a few years earlier to house the extended family). A number of people are seated around a rectangular, highly polished dining table, with *dad*, the fifty-year-old family patriarch, positioned ominously at one end, in an imposing high-backed chair.

They are taking tea from flower-patterned porcelain cups, accompanied by a dark fruit cake and cheese – a traditional and delicious snack in this part of the world – carried from person to person on a embossed silver platter by two teenage girls, ostensibly the older *sisters* of the baby-to-be. *Dad* was addressing a thirty-something gent to his left, whose pushed-back, *Brylcreamed* hair, lay dark and shiny on a larger-than-normal head, which in turn sported an equally prominent nose. The look on the man's face transmitted

a strange mix of arrogance and fear. To top off an effect which seemed to beg playing-up, rather than playing-down the alleged errant behavior, the comparatively younger man was wearing a rather bright, mustard-and-green, plaid jacket: fashionable in Scotland perhaps.

“Now listen here young man,” the older one bellowed in a thick Yorkshire dialect, while glowering at his adversary, *“You come here with your crippled wife.”* He gestured with disdain to a somewhat gaunt-looking lady in a wheelchair, sitting next to the younger man. *“And this boy of yours.”* (a nine or ten-year-old boy could be seen at the far end of the room, playing on the floor). *“And then you have the cheek to tell me it was all an accident; that you were suffering the after-effects of flying over Germany, or some such rubbish. Well let me tell you young lad, I think it’s a whole lot of balderdash; I was also an airman in the war, The First World War, and I never got any lady into trouble, as you have done with our young Dorothy here! You should be ashamed of yourself! I tell you frankly, downright ashamed!”* His finale to this little tirade was accompanied by a loud thump on the table, causing the white porcelain cups to rattle in their saucers and the younger man to recoil sharply, looking decidedly fearful – rather than arrogant - as if thinking he would be the next item to be pummeled.

Dad’s fuming red face extended upwards to his receding, grey hairline. His first-born daughter - his angel of mercy - had been sullied and misled by a de-mobbed Royal Air Force pilot. It was high time to seek some sort of revenge and today was the day he would do it. His stoic Yorkshire character told him that the young man sitting next to him needed to be taught a lesson; a sharp lesson that he would never forget.

Dorothy sat, looking rather sheepish, alongside her father and opposite the man whom she had made love to some three months before, now staring down at her slightly larger-than-usual belly. She could never have thought in her wildest dreams that the man she had known briefly as a single, thus un-betrothed airman – a man who had said he was disturbed by a bloody war and in desperate need of rest and recuperation – was now here in this room, fighting off assault waves from her own enraged father. Her

unforgiving dalliance had become her wildest nightmare. And though this father-to-be of her own baby now seemed a little arrogant, even insolent, she well remembered that time, not long before, when she had fallen for his charismatic, outgoing nature and believing his story, had given up her carefully protected virginity.

Now, she sat and observed the man's disabled wife, who in turn sat grim-faced and silent, staring blankly at a framed painting of a seaside scene on the opposite wall. Her face was a vision of despair: her life also turned upside down by the man she had trusted implicitly since their marriage ten years before. In different ways both women had been betrayed by the same man, in his lust for a new conquest. The wife, glancing unseen at the husband sitting next to her, began to realise more or less instinctively that Dorothy was not the first woman he had slept with, beyond their marriage vows ... and perhaps more importantly, would not be the last. Her thinking was consumed by what was to happen next.

"Let me tell you," dad continued. *"it's high time for explanations young man. You can't go around doing this sort of thing. It's not done here in Yorkshire and I don't think it's very well accepted North of the border either, where you hail from. There are consequences, as we can now well-see my lad!"* (he nodded pointedly towards His daughter's growing tummy). *"You're supposed to be a responsible citizen. Your air-force training should have damn-well told you that fact of life!"* Another thump on the table, accompanied by rattling teacups, once again caused the younger man to cringe and look away ... towards his disabled wife (though in truth, he knew deep down that due to his wayward actions, this had now become a route which offered little support).

"I'm sorry sir. It wasn't meant to be like this; I'd just arrived back from the occupation, when we happened by chance to meet." This was all the poor besieged guy could offer up, in a voice that seemed like a whimper against the older man's bellow.

The younger man's last feeble sentence was like a red rag to a bull for the patriarch; like a cue offered up by the straight man in a comic duo. *"Sorry! Sorry? Your dead right it*

wasn't meant to be like this! Our Dorothy is a fine upstanding Yorkshire lass. Now look what you've done to her! You look like a talking parrot from the jungles of Brazil in that ridiculous jacket; God knows what our Dorothy here ever saw in you." The wife transfixed, on hearing this, thought much the same: she had made a grave mistake in marrying the man, and today's resounding upheaval was the ultimate consequence.

And so it went on: the young man berated and cowering under the strain, the lady in her wheelchair staring at the painting as she mused on the man she had once trusted, and the young boy playing in blissful ignorance on the floor. Nothing really could be changed or amended; the deed was done, and everyone involved would live from that day on, with the after effects, including the small foetus that was slowly developing inside the womb of Dorothy: the boy called George, to be.

At the finish the head of the family had his final say. *"Well, despite what you've done, we've decided that Dorothy will have the child and mam and I will look after it, as if it was our very own."* He gestured to *mam*, as she was known by everyone, who had been silent, but listening attentively throughout at the far end of the table. *"You can take yourself and your little family back to sunny Scotland my lad, where you came from, and carry on with your merry little life; though I guess it may not be too merry from now on, judging by the look on the face of the lady you call your wife!"* He was still red-raw angry, but managed to appear a little pleased with himself at this thinly disguised, if somewhat malicious joke.

The lightly veiled forecast from the patriarch did in fact come to pass, when a few years later the wheelchair-bound lady accompanied by the boy, walked out on her husband, after which her husband decamped to marriage with a long-term employee, from the pub he and his former wife had managed on the East coast of Scotland. Forever after that, the young boy who had come with his parents to the seismic meeting at the grand old house in Yorkshire, remembered his mother's unrelenting referral to his father's new wife as: *"that fucking barmaid!"*

For the yet-to-be-born baby, that was the last his mother and her family saw or heard of the couple from Scotland, though the young boy playing at the end of the room, would come back to feature in the life of *baby* George, more than fifty years on from that historic day. In time to come they would meet, and the boy – by then retired - would recount the details of that day, tinged with a sense of humour, thus enabling George to piece together a previously unknown part of the jigsaw from his past.

Dorothy hid away in the family doctor's premises, first as receptionist, and when her belly was beginning to show, as after-hours housemaid. On returning to the family fold with her newborn in a cardboard box, *mam* took over the reins: a tiny Scottish lady, exceptionally beautiful in her youth and now the matriarch; respected, almost revered by all, including her husband of some thirty years.

"Such a beautiful wee bairn." *mam* said with a loving tenderness as she lifted the baby from the box, giving him a pronounced peck on the nose. The young child, just a few days old, peeked out from his tightly wrapped, sky-blue blanket, smiling back at her as if he knew he was in safe hands. And indeed he was ... for a few short years at least.

"As we agreed Dorothy," she said firmly, whilst continuing to gaze lovingly at the baby she was holding, *"I shall be his mother from now on, and no one, not one soul outside this place, will be the wiser. Your brothers and sisters have all been sworn to secrecy."*

Mam then placed the young baby George lovingly into the cot, installed earlier that day, at the foot of her bed. She pulled the soft blanket up to cover the back of his head and ears, then bending down to kiss him on the cheek, continued:

"You will carry on next week with your teaching, as if nothing has happened. You have missed the first few weeks of term, but it's been a bitterly cold winter and I told them you had gone down with a severe flu, which they accepted. You're a talented young language teacher Dorothy and they want you back. You will focus on your career and leave young George to me"

“When you come home and you are inside this house, George of course is yours. But outside and for the rest of the world to see, he is mine. It’s best like this, if you value your future and don’t want to be tormented by righteous gossip for the rest of your life.”

Dorothy looked on, with those vivid memories from the notorious meeting before George was born, in the back of her mind, while now - as something of a follow-up - listening to the assertive declarations from her own mother, subsequent to the birth. She really had no choice in the matter. Her parents were so admired by all around them - family and friends - to go against their bidding would have been utterly unthinkable, in that time and place ... even if it was the fate of her bastard child at stake!

George gained an insight to these events decades after the event, some from his half-brother – the boy playing on the floor prior to his birth in Yorkshire:

“My half-brother, Craig, I first met as a recently retired, mid-sixties golfing devotee, while I was still slogging away at work in my fifties. Rather late in the piece, I had found him after searching through births, deaths and marriage records in Edinburgh.

He was understandably hazy about the infamous meeting. Who wouldn’t be, after more than five decades? However, he did recall the drive down from Aberdeen and cream cakes being served at a somewhat turbulent gathering, where an older man became decidedly aggressive towards his father. He remembered his mum and dad speaking hardly a word on the return journey, and arriving home in the dead of night.

Craig was a lovely guy, eager to fill in the gaps for me where possible. Sadly, he succumbed to Hodgkin’s Lymphoma just five years after I met him, but at least we knew each other for a while. He was of course the connection to my real father, who had passed away twenty years before. His recall of my father was quite sparse; a year or two after that day in Yorkshire, his parents had separated and he had come South of the border, with his mother, to live in Manchester. But his recollections were in some ways

unexpected, disclosing to me that after returning from the war 'our' father had a roving commission, selling Electrolux vacuum cleaners from door to door. He indicated that he felt our father may have had a roving eye for the ladies, and suspected that I was probably not the only 'bastard' alive to tell the tale.

I can only assume the meeting that day in Yorkshire became the watershed for my father in terms of life with his then wife and their legitimate son. If, as Craig had assumed, there were indeed other illegitimate children littering the highways and byways of Scotland, then he was soundly found out on that day, when he came with his wife to meet my family to be. At times I feel aggrieved that I missed meeting my father by less than one year. He could, I am sure, have told me so much more.

.....